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## CHARACTER, CIVIC RENEWAL AND SERVICE LEARNING FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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*ABSTRACT: This article explores the civic republican conception of citizenship underlying the Labour government's programme of civil renewal and the introduction of education for democratic citizenship. It considers the importance of the cultivation of civic virtue through political participation for such developments and it reviews the research into how service learning linked to character education can lead to the civic virtue of duty or social responsibility.*

*Keywords: civic republicanism, civil renewal, citizenship education, civic virtue, political participation, character, service learning*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

To what extent does the introduction of citizenship education presuppose a civic republican conception of citizenship which requires the cultivation of civic virtue through political participation? I would like to explore how the introduction of citizenship education is part of a programme of civil renewal which is informed not only by contemporary communitarianism but also civic republicanism. Such an education is linked to what James Arthur has termed 'education with character' (Arthur, 2003). I would also like to consider how such an education for democratic citizenship in schools and higher education requires the cultivation of civic virtue through political participation, which students can experience through service learning. Finally, I would like to review some studies which indicate that service learning or community based learning can enable students to develop both civic virtue and argue for the need for greater research into the outcomes of such learning activity in the UK.

## 2. POLICY CONTEXT

The current 'New Labour' government has espoused a programme of civil renewal that is informed by a set of beliefs and values involving faith traditions, ethical socialism, communitarianism and more recently civic republicanism. In civic republicanism (cf. Maynor, 2003; Oldfield, 1990; Pettit, 1997) freedom consists of active self-government and liberty rests not simply in negative liberty but in active participation in a political community. According to the Home Secretary, David Blunkett,

The 'civic republican' tradition of democratic thought has always been an important influence for me ... This tradition offers us a substantive account of the importance of community, in which duty and civic virtues play a strong and formative role. As such, it is a tradition of thinking which rejects unfettered individualism and criticises the elevation of individual entitlements above the common values needed to sustain worthwhile and purposeful lives. We do not enter life unencumbered by any community commitments, and we cannot live in isolation from others. (Blunkett, 2001, p. 19)

The Home Office has established the Civil Renewal Unit and developed a new agenda for civil renewal through creating new opportunities for civic engagement. It is also this civic republican conception of politics which I would argue animates the Crick Report on education for citizenship and the new curriculum for citizenship.

One of the major challenges facing civic republicanism is that it traditionally identified citizenship with being an educated male property holder. The creation of a shared political identity underlying citizenship should also allow for multiple political identities based on gender, race, ethnicity, social exclusion, etc. It may be that the civic republican politics of contestability, as recently argued for by Philip Pettit (Pettit, 1997), may provide a more pluralist basis for citizenship in contemporary Britain than traditional republican politics. Recent theorists of liberal democracy like Eamonn Callan also argue that an education for citizenship must hold a constitutive ideal of liberal democracy while allowing for religious and cultural pluralism (Callan, 1997). I would argue that a more differentiated but universal concept of citizenship (cf. Lister, 1998) which encourages civic virtue and participation while maintaining individual liberty and allowing for cultural difference, will create a way of understanding citizenship that is appropriate for an education for democratic citizenship.

The question concerning to what extent British people are familiar or comfortable with the concept of citizenship raises questions about

to what extent the political language of citizenship and civic republicanism can increasingly be seen as a tradition of 'British' political thought which can provide the basis for a transformation of the more dominant liberal individualist political traditions. David Marquand in his reassessment of labour's social democratic politics has written,

If the argument set out above is right, one obvious if at first sight surprising implication is that the civic-republican tradition has more to say to a complex modern society in the late twentieth century than the liberal individualist one; that the protagonists of 'active citizenship' are right in laying stress on duty, action, and mutual loyalty, even if wrong in picking certain aspects out of the tradition, while ignoring the rest of the corpus from which they come. (Marquand, 1997, pp. 50–51)

David Marquand, in his argument for civic republicanism, emphasises the importance of civic duty and action. A 'strong democrat' like Benjamin Barber argues for the importance of civic engagement in maintaining a participatory civil society and calls for the maintenance of public spaces for civic participation. According to Barber, 'We live today in Tocqueville's vast new world of contractual associations – both political and economic – in which people interact as private persons linked only by contract and mutual self-interest, a world of diverse groups struggling for separate identities through which they might count for something politically in the national community' (Barber, 1998). For Barber the fundamental problem facing civil society is the challenge of providing citizens with 'the literacy required to live in a civil society, the competence to participate in democratic communities, the ability to think critically and act deliberately in a pluralist world, the empathy that permits us to hear and thus accommodate others, all involve skills that must be acquired' (Barber, 1992). As we will see later, Benjamin Barber and other political analysts see education for citizenship and service learning in schools and higher education as a key factor in maintaining civic virtue and civic participation. Equally, Robert Wuthnow sees civic participation in civil society as an important way in which people increasingly develop both civic virtues and spiritual moral values and the ability to engage in what the liberal Jewish theorist Michael Lerner has termed the 'politics of meaning' (Lerner, 1997; Wuthnow, 1996, 1997). For civic republicans, however, there is greater emphasis on the devolution of political power and the recognition of the role of civic virtue and participation in local communities.

How influential has the civic republican tradition actually been in Britain and to what extent are we witnessing a revival of this political

thinking both in contemporary political thought and in the conceptualizing of citizenship as evidenced by the 1998 Advisory Group on Citizenship's report? Richard Dagger in his influential study of civic education argues that a civic republican conception of citizenship can reconcile both liberal individuality and the cultivation of civic virtue and responsibility. He writes that, 'There is too much of value in the idea of rights – an idea rooted in firm and widespread convictions about human dignity and equality – to forsake it. The task, instead, is to find a way of strengthening the appeal of duty, community and related concepts while preserving the appeal of rights' (Dagger, 1997, p. 58 and cf. Maynor, 2003).

### 3. CIVIL RENEWAL AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

One area where this civic republicanism has had an important influence is citizenship education with the Crick Report on education for citizenship, the introduction of the new citizenship curriculum in England and other citizenship education developments in the UK (cf. Crick, 2002, pp.113–115 and Annette, 2003). In 1998 the Advisory Group on Citizenship, chaired by Sir Bernard Crick, published its report *Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools* (Advisory Group (Crick 1), 1998). This report saw citizenship education as comprising three separate but interrelated strands: social and moral responsibility, political literacy and community involvement. In the Crick Committee Report there is also recognition of the importance of service learning or active learning in the community, which is based upon the principles of experiential learning (Annette, 2000). Many schools in the UK now provide school students with the opportunity to engage in service-learning or in the UK, 'active learning in the community' (Wade, 1997 for the USA and for the UK cf. Annette, 1999; Potter, 2002). This was followed in 1999 by the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett's, order for a new national curriculum subject in citizenship education, which began to be introduced into secondary schools as a required subject from September 2002. To a considerable extent the Secretary of State's orders and the developing new curriculum have been shaped by the recommendations of the 1998 Advisory Group's report. In addition to the introduction of the national curriculum subject of 'citizenship education' in schools, there was a second Advisory Group on Citizenship, also chaired by Sir Bernard Crick. This examined the provision of citizenship education for 16–19 year olds who are in education as well as training and it published its report in 2000 (Advisory Group (Crick 2), 2000).

This report viewed citizenship as a life skill and argued that all young adults should have an entitlement for citizenship education based on participation and that they should all have the opportunity to have their achievement academically recognised. A developmental programme of pilot projects began in September 2001, followed by a second programme of pilots in 2002, which are being managed by the new Learning and Skills Development Agency. These developments in the UK provide the basis for establishing a provision for lifelong learning for active citizenship and civil renewal within schools and at 16–19 education and training. More recently the Civil Renewal Unit of the Home Office is piloting programmes for adult learning for active citizenship which will be linked to volunteering, community involvement and the activity of becoming a UK citizen.

The vision of the Advisory Group on Citizenship is a challenging one and there are, of course, many challenges to be faced if it is to be realised. Terence McLaughlin, among others, has raised a number of issues arising from the Advisory Group report (cf. McLaughlin, 2000 and Osler, 2000). This vision is, however, fundamentally a civic republican conception of citizenship with its emphasis on civic engagement and political culture. The extent to which these ideals will be realised in the actual practice of citizenship education remains to be seen.

#### 4. HIGHER EDUCATION AND CIVIL RENEWAL

To what extent do the institutions of higher education in the UK participate in this developing activity of civil renewal? In the USA, Harry Boyte has invoked the tradition of 'public work', which he argues goes beyond both liberal individualism and communitarianism and he has applied it to the movement for educational reform in higher education. According to Boyte and Kari:

Recasting civic education as the public work of higher education holds potential to move the collective efforts in civic renewal to a new stage. But this will entail re-examination of traditional pedagogy, scholarship, the public traditions of disciplines and systems of reward, among other things. As public cultures are recreated within institutions, the culture itself becomes a kind of overall pedagogy for such work. (Boyte and Kari, 2000, p. 51)

In 1999 in the USA, the national organisation, Campus Compact established the 'Presidents Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education' which was written by Thomas Ehrlich of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Elizabeth

Hollander, executive director of the Campus Compact. It was drafted with the assistance of a distinguished 'President's Leadership Colloquium' which included Derek Bok, the president emeritus of Harvard University. As of 2004 some 528 presidents of universities and colleges of higher education in the USA have signed the declaration. This document was itself influenced by the 'Wingspread Declaration on Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University' which was written by Harry Boyte of the University of Minnesota and Elizabeth Hollander of Campus Compact (cf. Ehrlich, 2000 and [www.compact.org](http://www.compact.org)). In 2003 the 'Association of American Colleges and Universities' and Campus Compact established the 'Center for Liberal Education and Civic Engagement' which is engaged in doing research into the civic engaged curriculum. There is a long tradition of linking of civic engagement and higher education in the USA from Thomas Jefferson's University of Virginia, to the Land Grant universities of the nineteenth century. Educational thinkers have also made this link, from the democratic education ideas of John Dewey, to the idea of the engaged campus of Ernest Boyer and to the more recent concerns with the civic responsibility of higher education given the decline of social capital according to Robert Putnam (cf. Ehrlich, 2002). Intellectually, the ideas of the American pragmatists and especially John Dewey have been an important influence on developing this linkage between citizenship and higher education through experiential learning (Ryan, 1997). What is particularly important about this pragmatic tradition of thought is how it has encouraged academics in higher education to periodically rethink the 'liberal education' curriculum and to consider how through forms of active, problem-based, and service learning it can encourage the moral and civic education of undergraduates (Kimball, 1995; Orrill, 1995 and 1998 and Benson and Harkavay, 2002).

Unlike the USA, most of the mission statements of universities and colleges of higher education in the UK do not use the rhetoric of civic republicanism and do not talk about promoting citizenship or civic responsibility. The main organisations of university heads, 'Universities, UK', has published a study of 'Universities and Communities' (CVCP, 1994) and more recently has commissioned research into the regional roles of higher education institutions (Universities UK, 2001). There is no discussion in these documents of the wider civic role of universities and colleges and there are certainly no proposals to consider how the undergraduate curriculum might enable students to develop their moral and civic capacity for active citizenship. This is also true of the recent government White

Paper, *The Future of Higher Education*, which concentrated much more on the funding mechanisms for higher education and on the need for more technology and business partnerships (cf. Collini, 2003).

While there are only a few researchers in the UK who are currently attempting to argue for the civic role of higher education (e.g. Ahier *et al.*, 2003; Annette, 1999; Annette *et al.*, 2000; Coffield and Williamson, 1997; Hall and Hall, 2002; Mohan, 1996), there is an interesting history in the UK of linking civic engagement and higher education, which has been largely ignored in the present discussions of the purpose and future of higher education. For example, the Scottish Universities as part of the legacy of the Scottish Enlightenment, were influenced by civic ideals and the study of moral philosophy, which became an integral part of the undergraduate curriculum (Davie, 1961; Winch, 1978). This civic idealism continued to be important in Scotland into the late nineteenth century and influenced the establishment of the 'civic universities' in the nineteenth century by reforming dissenting élites in the new industrial cities of England. In many respects these traditions of civic higher education continued until the emergence of academic disciplines and the establishment of the dominant model of the research university in the twentieth century. Another important intellectual tradition, which is to a large extent forgotten by educationalists today, is that of British idealism. T.H. Green, for example, not only considered education as a means of self-realisation but also saw learning as an integral part of a democratic participatory society (Gordon and White, 1979). It was also T.H. Green, a key influence on the development of British Idealism at Oxford, who was influential in the establishment of Toynbee Hall in the East End of London and the University Settlement Movement. His influence inspired idealistic young undergraduates to go into the inner cities to serve the poor as part of their ethical and civic duty (Boucher and Vincent, 2000, pp. 27–29). To a certain extent the ideas of the British Idealists influenced the New Liberalism of the early twentieth century and the higher educational reform ideas of R.B. Haldane and H.L. Fisher. These ideas also influenced the 'Robbins Report' of 1963, which called for the expansion of higher education while maintaining a commitment to the civic purpose of higher education, which is largely missing in the Dearing commission Report of 1997. While the development of the research university was slower to develop in the UK than the USA, by the late 1960s the earlier liberal ideas of education had largely disappeared in British higher education. It had given way to the disciplinary framework of the research university that still exists today and which is different from the still influential liberal arts framework in the undergraduate

curriculum in the USA. The recent government White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education*, while addressing both the globalisation of higher education and the need for more support for innovation in teaching and learning, also fails to address the issue of the civic role of universities and colleges of higher education in the UK. Despite the lack of a major movement for developing the civic role of higher education in the UK, there are an increasing number of academics who are now arguing for higher education to participate more fully in civil renewal. According to Bernard Crick, 'Universities are part of society and, in both senses of the word, a critical part which should be playing a major role in the wider objectives of creating a citizenship culture. I am now far from alone in arguing this' (Crick, 2000b, p. 145).

##### 5. HIGHER EDUCATION, CITIZENSHIP AND MORAL AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

There are in higher education in the UK an increasing number of academic programmes which provide learning for active citizenship through what has been called either active learning in the community, community based learning or service learning (Annette, 1999; 2003 and cf. Astin, 2002). This was influenced by the Dearing Commission into Higher Education (1997), which called for a greater emphasis in the undergraduate curriculum on the development of key skills and learning through work related or community based learning. This pedagogy of experiential learning is based on the learning cycle of David Kolb and has now firmly established itself in higher education and professional development. As a form of learning it is based not just on experience but on a structured learning experience with measurable learning outcomes. A key element of this type of learning is that it is based on reflection by the student on their activity of volunteering or civic engagement. This has been assisted by the Higher Education Active Community Fund (HEACF), which is a HEFCE fund which is assisting universities and colleges of higher education in England to promote volunteering and community partnerships. While this has resulted in the certification of volunteering or community service there have been an increasing number of academic programmes which accredit the learning involved. There is the CSV/Council for Citizenship and Learning in the Community (CCLC) which is a national network of community based learning or service learning programmes which holds a national conference and is now linked to over two hundred programmes in UK higher education institutions. Increasingly these programmes in the UK promote learning not just for generic life

skills but also the knowledge, skills and understanding necessary for active citizenship. Professor Benjamin Barber, in a number of influential articles and books, has advocated the education for active citizenship through engaging in critical thinking about politics and civil society and through service learning. While there has been a tradition of community-based internship and experiential education since the 1960s, the new emphasis in the USA since the 1990s has been on the link between citizenship education and service learning (Guarasci and Cornwall, 1997; Reecher and Cammarano, 1997; Rimmerman, 1997). There is also an increasing emphasis on the need for service-learning programmes to meet the needs of local community partners (Cruz and Giles, 2000; Gelmon *et al.*, 2001). Service Learning can not only help build a type of 'bridging as well as bonding social capital' (cf. Putnam, 2000) it may also develop the capacity building for democratic citizenship within civil society (Annette, 1999; Battistoni, 2002; Kahne *et al.*, 2000) An important research question which needs to be examined is, what are the necessary elements of a service learning programme which can build not only social capital but also active citizenship (Annette, 2003; Campbell, 2000; Kahane *et al.*, 2000).

In the USA Thomas Ehrlich and Anne Colby and associates have recently published the initial findings of the project of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching on 'Higher Education and the Development of Moral and Civic Capacity' (Ehrlich, Colby, *et al.*, 2003 and cf. [www.kml.carnegiefoundation.org/mcr/](http://www.kml.carnegiefoundation.org/mcr/)). They argue that:

Moral and civic development has always been central to the goals of liberal education. In fact, we believe that the movement to strengthen undergraduate moral and civic education is best understood as an important part of the broader efforts to revitalise liberal education, which many commentators have suggested has lost its way in the era since World War II. (Ehrlich, Colby, *et al.*, 2003, p. 23; cf. Orrill, 1995 and 1998)

In their study they examine the programmes and campus cultures of twelve diverse higher education institutions in the USA.

What is particularly interesting about the study by Colby and Ehrlich for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching is its insistence that learning through 'political engagement' is necessary for providing a full education for citizenship in higher education as distinct from the wider experience of civic engagement. They write that, 'Even in this relatively broad definition of political

engagement, not all forms of civic involvement counts as political' (Ehrlich and Colby, 2003, p. 19). Thus service learning that is based solely on volunteering and does not address public policy issues is not seen as providing the type of experiential learning through political engagement that they consider necessary for an education for citizenship. There is, therefore, a need to conceptualise what is the 'political' in examining how an education for citizenship might be introduced into the curriculum of higher education in the UK (cf. Crick, 2000a for a consideration of what constitutes the political and its importance for democracy). According to Bernard Crick, 'Some leading politicians in both countries try to bridge the contradiction between the convenience of liberal democratic theory for the conduct of government and the more disruptive, unpredictable civic republican theory. They try to reduce, whether sincerely or cynically, citizenship to "volunteering" ...' (Crick, 2002).

As they clearly recognise, only a limited number of universities and colleges in the USA provide a full range of learning opportunities for active citizenship despite the increasing influence of the pedagogy of service learning. These institutions approach the learning of civic and moral responsibility in different ways which can include the building of the student's character or virtues, both moral and civic, an emphasis on social responsibility or social justice and also engagement with local communities. These ways are linked to a variety of pedagogical approaches from student leadership education, active and problem-based learning, to issues-based democratic deliberative forums, to service-learning, etc. which have been developed in most of the twelve higher education institutions that are participating in this project. In the UK there are now a number of pilot student leadership programmes (e.g. The York Awards, the Exeter University student leadership programme and the Middlesex University 'Leadership and Citizenship' Award Programme) but we do not fully enough link this with character education (cf. Arthur, 2003). In addition, there are a variety of experiential and active learning pedagogies being introduced in UK higher education but nothing like the Kettering Foundation 'National Issues Forums' in the USA which promote the knowledge and skills of deliberative democracy. While the Teacher Training Agency in the UK, through CITIZED, has provided school teachers with a number of initiatives to support them there has been no equivalent resource that has been provided for academics in higher education.

One of the challenges in providing experiential learning, which involves forms of political engagement, is the evidence that increasingly young people are still interested in involvement in their

communities but are alienated from the formal political process (cf. Annette, 2003; Hall and Hall, 2002). Colby and Ehrlich argue that we need to analyse the motivations that encourage students to take advantage of these learning opportunities for active citizenship. In the UK in a recent qualitative study, students at Anglia Polytechnic University and Cambridge University were analysed to consider how they learn both formally and informally for citizenship to become what are called 'graduate citizens'. While this study has, I believe, a somewhat limited understanding of contemporary citizenship and community, its lifecourse research reinforces the contradiction between students who want to become involved in their communities but are turned off politics.

In a 1997 report entitled *Their Best Selves: Building Character Education and Service Learning Together*, the author Bruce Boston argued why character education and service learning fit well together (Boston, 1997). He argues that service learning provides an experiential way of understanding abstract moral thinking. Service Learning also enables students to develop their moral imagination and provides experiential learning opportunities to build character. This links well with the empirical research of William Perry, which is little known in the UK, on the intellectual and moral development of students in higher education (Perry, 1970; 1981). Perry developed a model of personal development which emphasises the importance of affective learning and the growth from simple modes of thinking and feeling to more complex ways. Thus experiential learning provides meaning learning opportunities to experience moral development.

The research of Colby and Ehrlich following Youniss and Yates (1997) and Verba *et al.* (1995) also argues that the development of an identity as an active citizen within students in higher education is similar to the development of moral behaviour as analysed by Kohlberg and other theorists of character development. Much more research is needed into the moral development of higher education students to better understand how a curriculum for active citizenship might be best developed in the UK. (For schools cf. Arthur, 2003.)

## 6. CONCLUSION

An important aspect of the studies of Thomas Ehrlich and Anne Colby in the USA (Ehrlich *et al.*, 2003 and cf. [www.kml.carnegiefoundation.org/mcr/](http://www.kml.carnegiefoundation.org/mcr/)) and Ahier *et al.* in the UK (2003) is the emphasis placed on the need for the development of students' moral sense of civic duty or responsibility.

In a now well-known passage the Crick Committee Report argued that:

We aim at no less than a change in the political culture of this country both nationally and locally: for people to think of themselves as active citizens, willing, able and equipped to have an influence on public life and with the critical capacities to weigh evidence before speaking and acting; to build on and to extend radically to young people the best in existing traditions of community involvement and public service, and to make them individually confident in finding new forms of involvement and action among themselves. (Advisory Group on Citizenship, 1998, p. 7; cf. Crick 2000b, 2002)

For Richard Dagger in his discussion of civic virtues, 'The virtuous citizen will therefore be one who regards political participation as a necessary contribution – and perhaps even an enjoyable one – to the good of the community' (Dagger, 1997, p. 197).

In what ways does the curriculum of higher education provide students with learning opportunities for their moral and civic development? I have tried to argue that service learning provides experiential learning opportunities for students in higher education to develop civic virtue through civic engagement.

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